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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3800
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2631
RUEHBD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0782
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SUBJECT: MODERATION, PRAGMATISM EXPLAIN ISLAMIC PARTY'S
SUCCESS

REF: A. JAKARTA 893

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 846

[1](#)C. JAKARTA 801

[1](#)D. (04) JAKARTA 7259

JAKARTA 00000939 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Lean, clean and Islamic, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) has emerged as the darling of Indonesian politics. PKS's brand of moderate pragmatism and its ability to mobilize its grassroots base has enticed the major parties to court PKS as a potential partner for the 2009 national elections. Still, while PKS seems poised to be the third largest party in 2009, it has yet to dispel its conservative Muslim stigma, as moderates struggle with Islamists for control of the party. Its ideology aside, PKS's rise is serving as a model to other parties of good governance and effective grassroots campaigning. END SUMMARY.

A PARTY THAT'S IN THE NEWS

[1](#)2. (C) PKS is in the news mainly because its candidates recently won two key gubernatorial elections (see ref C), leaving many to wonder about the party's ideology and platform. Born out of the Indonesian student Muslim movement of the 1990s, PKS members tend to be young, (20 to 40 years of age), well-educated (many with technical, business and economic degrees), and tech savvy. PKS was dominated by Middle Eastern educated Islamist leaders in its early years (ref D). Today, Western-educated moderates are increasingly taking control, according to several PKS members of Parliament (MPs) and political observers who spoke recently with DepPol/C.

[1](#)3. (C) Several of these party leaders have participated in USG exchange programs and said these visits opened their horizons. The extremists are gradually being isolated and pushed out of the party, said MP Zulkiflimansyah (Zul), the leading spokesperson for the party's more moderate faction.

PKS Deputy Chairman Fahri Hamzah told us that Arab-educated PKS members see the world differently and are more extreme.

A CLEAN REPUTATION

14. (C) PKS's platform of anti-corruption, clean governance and social welfare resonates. While rumors of corruption within PKS are increasing, even its critics admit that PKS is the cleanest party of all the others. For example, almost all the gifts that politicians have turned over to the National Corruption Commission (KPK) have come from PKS, according to Raja Juli Antoni, director of the Maarif Institute, an NGO founded by Muhammadiyah, the country's second largest Islamic organization. PKS officials discussed with us their party's rigorous internal system to monitor corruption.

15. (C) PKS's recent upset electoral victories in two key gubernatorial elections and its charm offensive, have gotten everyone's attention (ref C). In January, PKS held its annual party congress at a beach hotel on the mostly Hindu island of Bali, which party organizers said was done purposefully to demonstrate PKS's inclusiveness of all faiths. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani spoke at an April launch of the PKS's 643-page policy tome, praising its advocacy of free market systems. Then, on May 5, the PKS tenth anniversary party was attended by over 100,000, including President Yudhoyono, Golkar Party Chairman Akbar Tanjung and other presidential aspirants (ref A).

16. (C) PKS leaders told DepPol/C that they support a secular government and that they privately opposed the recent recommendation by official bodies to ban the Islamic Ahmadiyah sect (ref B). Even in its early days, PKS never

JAKARTA 00000939 002.2 OF 003

supported Shariah law, they note. Instead PKS advocates the "Medina Charter," which they say is historically based on tolerance of non-Muslims, including Jews. The Medina Charter appears to allow PKS to maintain its Islamic values plank for conservative Muslims while still appealing to secular-nationalists as a party of tolerance.

ARE THEY MORE RADICAL THAN THEY LET ON?

17. (C) Still, some Indonesian secular-nationalists distrust PKS as a "sheep in wolf's clothing" with intentions to impose conservative values on Indonesia should it gain power. This distrust is due to PKS's origins as an Islamic party, according to Mohammad Sobary, director of the governance reform organization Kemitraan. PKS, and its precursor the Justice Party (PK), were never radical but PKS did join with extremist groups on some causes, such as calling for the release from prison of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (co-founder of the terrorist Jemmah Islamiyah group), promoting conspiracy theories re the 2002 Bali bombing, and organizing the March 2003 "Million People March" against the invasion of Iraq. PKS's more recent support of the controversial anti-pornography bill and what some see as regressive moral laws have further fed suspicions.

18. (C) On the other hand, contacts who have worked directly with PKS told DepPol/C that PKS leaders they have met are predominantly moderate. Most Shariah-based laws passed at the local levels were passed by Golkar Party governments, not PKS. In the West Java elections won by PKS, PKS was the only party whose candidates did not wear Islamic caps, for example. For its part, PKS blames its Islamist stigma on a smear campaign by political opponents.

YOUNG AND NIMBLE

19. (C) PKS is effective because it is young and adaptable. To begin with, it developed a culture of open communication through its student movement origins, contacts have told us. PKS is the most adept at using the Internet and SMS to

communicate with its members. When the International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted training with local political leaders, PKS would send more people than its allotted quota and genuinely learned from the training, while the other parties would send fewer people, and the wrong ones at that.

¶10. (C) PKS also holds weekly discussion sessions at which they review both spiritual and worldly issues, such as how women can monitor elections polls. They conduct regular social welfare programs. PKS can reach large numbers because it has low operating costs. One health clinic it held gave inoculations to 200 persons at a cost of about a dollar per person, using volunteer doctors and donated medicine, one NGO trainer observed. Because of its white collar composition, PKS also is able to raise money internally because its entrepreneurial members know how to make money. (Note: On the other hand, a PKS official admitted to DepPol/C that the party is still accepting money from Saudi Arabia, "because Saudi has a lot of money to give and we need it for our charity projects.")

¶11. (C) PKS also carries out regular political polling and bases its platform on that polling, political analysts say. Thus, PKS was the first party to focus strongly on the hot button issues of poverty, economic development and infrastructure, and this stance helped it to win recent elections. PKS has played down Islamic values issues because its polls showed that these issues do not matter to most people, PKS leaders admitted.

FUTURE SUCCESS OR NOT?

JAKARTA 00000939 003.2 OF 003

¶12. (C) Still, PKS's ability to maintain momentum and its record of good governance is far from assured. It knows that its successes in local elections will not automatically carry over into the 2009 national elections. Political observers all agree that PKS's goal of 20 percent of the vote in the May 2009 Parliamentary elections is unrealistic but some agreed that between 12 and 15 percent is achievable. Others are doubtful they can get even 10 percent. Antoni noted that PKS got 7 percent in 2004 but that an October 2007 poll by the respected Indonesian Survey Institute showed that PKS was supported by only four percent of the voters.

¶13. (C) PKS is hampered by internal divisions between conservative and moderate elements and unless the party can open itself up to a mass, secular base, it cannot hope to expand beyond 15 percent, observers agreed, an assertion acknowledged by PKS leaders. PKS's current base of urban Muslim intellectuals is too limited, said political scientist Dewi Anwar Fortuna. PKS's run of recent successes was due to its selection of winning local personalities as candidates rather than party ideology, she added. Voters also chose PKS as a no-confidence vote for the establishment parties, others observed.

IS THE SHINE WEARING OFF?

¶14. (C) Finally, as PKS grows and wins elections, its sheen is dulling a bit. Rumors of corruption are cropping up both locally and nationally, several observers said. PKS also has not performed well in some places where it controls the local government, such as in Depok city on the outskirts of Jakarta which PKS itself acknowledges is a failure in good governance.

¶15. (C) As for presidential aspirations, all the PKS leaders and observers we spoke with said PKS will probably not be in position in 2009 to nominate someone for president. A vice presidential nomination is a possibility, however. (Note: See septel on PKS' star politician, Hidayat Nur Wahid.) Meanwhile, PKS continues to court all the major political parties and all the parties are wooing PKS. PKS leaders said

any alliance is possible but that this will not play out until after the 2009 Parliamentary elections. The best bet at this point would be for PKS to stick with President Yudhoyono (PKS is currently a member of his governing coalition) with a PKS running mate as one of several viable options. Over all, in terms of its mid- to long-term impact on Indonesian politics, PKS's rise is serving as a model to other parties of good governance and effective grassroots campaigning.

HUME